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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to discuss in brief six racial and ethnic minority groups in the United States, in order to demonstrate how selected cultural variables may intrude in the counseling relationship. American Indians present such problems as language difficulties, taciturnity, and suspiciousness. In working with Americans of African descent, the counselor is apt to encounter two kinds of problems, the first related to the counseling process and the second related to the product, goal, or outcome. Because of long geographical isolation and strong resistance to change, residents of Appalachia may be considered an ethnic minority. They, in the counseling relationship, present cultural barriers related to listening, personalism, and language. Spanish heritage groups introduce a language barrier, demand for respect, machismo, and suspicion as sources of difficulty in counseling. Since American Jews constitute a cultural community, the counselor unfamiliar with the ethos of the group may be ineffectual helping them. To be effective, the non-Japanese counselor needs to understand several aspects of the Japanese American personality: envy and shame, modesty and reserve, and generation differences. (Author/JM)

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Counseling Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the United States*

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by

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Although the United States has been characterized as a melting pot, many racial and ethnic minorities have not melted. They, while part of the total culture, simultaneously are products of sub-cultures, from which they acquire language patterns, customs, values, and Weltanschauungs which are often foreign to exclusive members of the dominant culture.

Counselors must understand not only the larger culture but the unique aspects of minority group sub-cultures too. Counselors who apply their professional skills among minorities must be vigilant in their search for and attempt to overcome cultural barriers which potentially render them ineffectual.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss in brief six racial and ethnic minority groups in this country, in order to demonstrate how selected cultural variables may intrude in the counseling relationship. The groups discussed are American Indians, Americans of African descent, Appalachian whites, Spanish heritage groups, Jewish Americans, and Japanese-Americans.

American Indians

Estimates of the American Indian population range from 367,179 to 1,500,000. The 1960 Census reported 552,000, including 28,000 Aleuts and Eskimos. Of this total, slightly more than 300,000 lived on trust lands. A more recent estimate places the nation's Indian population at about 600,000 with approximately two-thirds living within the jurisdiction of the federal government and the rest living away from the reservations in varying states of assimilation (Hansen, 1970, pp. 160-161).

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Wilson (1969) maintains that less than one-half of all American Indians still live on reservations. A reported, 40,000 are in Los Angeles, 30,000 in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay area, 20,000 in Chicago, 15,000 in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, and lesser numbers in other cities. Although the counselor working with Indians should recognize individual tribal differences, he simultaneously needs to be aware of cultural variables which are characteristic of Indians in general.

Language difficulties. The counselor on a reservation may have problems communicating with his Indian counselees, since many Indians do not speak English. Even those who appear to have generally good command of the language often find it difficult to understand abstract words, for they traditionally communicate in basic concrete language.

Taciturnity. Related to language difficulty is the Indian's taciturnity. Since the Indian communicates with great economy of words, the counselor who expects fluency in interviews, may feel uncomfortable trying to get Indians to open up (U.S. Department of Labor, 1967, p. 9). Also, he may be inclined to diagnose counselees retarded, simply because they fail to talk with the fluency to which the counselor has become accustomed.

Suspiciousness. According to Schoeck (1969, p. 33), Indians are suspicious. They are suspicious of extremes--the extremely rich, poor, influential, and old. They are suspicious of other Indians who outdo them at anything. This attitude explains why Indian children are reluctant to volunteer answers in class; it also helps to explain why they are reluctant to assume leadership roles.

The counselor who is perceived as trying to cause Indians to change in some way is apt to be branded persona non grata. The counselor who tries to get them to earn better grades, to get them in college, to take a better job, or to go away to the city so they can improve themselves may be considered a bad guy because he is apt to get them in trouble with their peers, by making the peers think that they, the actors, are better than the peers.

Americans of African Descent

Americans of African descent constitute the lagest minority group in the United States. They also are the most visibly different and most disfranchised of the minorities. In working with them, the counselor is apt to encounter two kinds of problems. The first one is related to the counseling process; the second, to the product, goal, or outcome. However, the two are not always mutually exclusive.

Process problems. Basic to counseling is the establishment of rapport. Racial differences constitute impediments to this process (Vontress, 1971). Rapport suggests empathy, and one finds it easier to establish empathy with those like himself than with others (Katz, 1963, p. 6). Therefore, the white counselor can expect rapport difficulties, especially in the initial phases of the relationship. Awareness of this possibility prevents him from doing anything which turns off the black client (Daniel, 1970). For example, he should not attempt to show affinity for black people by "Some of my best friends are" rhetoric. Derogatory expressions such as "You people" and Negro pronounced "Niggra" should also be avoided.

Rapport difficulties may ensue from improper racial designations, such as "Negro" when the client prefers "black." One way to avoid this mistake is to wait until the client uses the preferred designation and then follow suit. Another impediment to rapport is the counselor's accent. A white counselor with a Southern drawl almost always puts the African descent client on guard, especially when the setting is outside the South.

Other aspects of language may cause problems in the relationship. Some African descent people use an argot, designed in part to keep others in the dark. Although ethnic jargon eventually finds its way into standard English or finally goes out of existence, what does the counselor do in the meantime, when his client uses a venacular which is foreign to him? He may ask the speaker to translate; he may do as some Americans do when they go to Paris with their high school French:

keep saying Oui, Oui, and hope to eventually catch up with the native speaker; or he can go where the language is spoken and learn it first hand. Since reflection is a basic counseling technique, it is important to understand fluently the language of the client.

Another relationship problem is reserve in self-disclosure. Sidney Jourard (1964, p. 13) has found that people of African descent are extremely reluctant to disclose themselves to others. Kardiner and Ovesey (1962, p. 308) suggest that African descent people, especially men, are afraid to reveal themselves to others, because they are devoid of confidence in human relations. Reluctance to disclose is especially a problem in the white-black dyad, because few blacks initially perceive whites as individuals of good will.

The client discloses most fluently when he feels that he can trust the target person, not necessarily when he feels he is being understood. In fact, the black client fears being understood, for it carries with it the idea of engulfment, of loss of autonomy, of being known, and that is the same as being destroyed in a racist society (Polster, 1969). Obviously, the fear of being understood has grave implications for individual and group counseling. It is even conceivable that the individual who understands too much is to be feared and even hated.

Product problems. Relationship problems are many, especially in the white-black dyad. Even so, the most difficult problem in the salt and pepper relationship is that of determining what the matter is; i.e., arriving at an accurate diagnosis. The problem of the black personality cannot be separated from the life blacks live in this country (Kardiner & Ovesey, 1962, p. 387). The special properties of black identity cannot be divorced from the institutional life as seen in the family, school, church, and recreational and employment settings. To be ignorant of black institutions is to be ignorant of black people, which perforce leads to false diagnosis of them and their problems. For example, one should guard against calling a black paranoid, when he, the black, actually lives in an environment that persecutes him (Kardiner & Ovesey, 1962, p. 343

Appalachian Whites

Mention Appalachia and people conjure images of a mountaineer with a shotgun in West Virginia, or a moonshiner at his still in Tennessee. They are surprised to learn that counties in New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi also are included in Appalachia as defined by the federal government (Surface, 1971, p. 13). One may also be astonished to discover that there are also appalachian blacks, although we seldom hear about them. About one-tenth of Appalachian families are nonwhite (Copp, 1965).

Because of long geographical isolation and strong resistance to change, residents of Appalachia may be considered an ethnic minority. As such, they, in the counseling relationship, present cultural barriers which in the main are as difficult to overcome as are those encountered in counseling blacks, Chicanos, and Oriental Americans.

Listening. Counseling, among other things, requires listening, an area in which Appalachians have some difficulty, probably because of their early socialization. Generally, their homes are filled with din and confusion (Surface, 1971, p. 32). It often appears that everybody is talking simultaneously. Young people are not taught to listen to what words mean, but to what emotion the speaker is conveying (Weller, 1966, p. 67). This is why the counselor, if he looks closely, is apt to find a blank stare on the face of his appalachian counselee, even when the counselor thinks he is imparting great wisdom and insight. The stare means that the would be listener has tuned the counselor out until his face stops opening. This helps to explain why it often appears that Appalachian conversation has little continuity of ideas. The inability to listen hampers more directly group counseling than it does individual interaction.

Personalism. Although the Appalachian may not be characterized as particularly warm people, they do put a lot of stock in being neighborly. The Appalachian finds his self-identification mainly in his relationship with others

(Weller, 1966, p. 83). Therefore, it is more important to pass the time of day with a friend you just happen to bump into on the way to the local employment office than it is to arrive at the office at the appointed time.

Mountain people are not slaves to the clock (Weller, 1966, p. 159). Their business is transacted by feelings rather than bureaucratic protocol. In fact, people who believe in appointments, starting meetings on time, getting down to business, or planning ahead are suspect. Needless to say, personalism hinders counseling in several ways. The counselor encounters problems in getting his clients to make and keep appointments. Also, he should have a light caseload, for the Appalachian may just drop by to "pass a spell"; and he just may get around to discussing a problem while he is there. He wants to be neighborly, and being neighborly takes time.

Language problem. Mountain folks use terse, simple, concrete Anglo-Saxon words, not long, abstract, and Latinic ones (Weller, 1966, p. 144). Their working vocabulary is extremely limited, and their sentences are short and direct. They have trouble understanding involved sentences and words which convey abstractions and nuances. The counselor who expects his counselee to talk about how he feels about a thing or person is apt to be disappointed with the Appalachian, who is apt to conclude that the counselor not only talks funny but must be a little "touched" as well.

Although there is a language barrier in counseling many Appalachians, the impediment reflects something greater: cultural differences. When a member of the dominant group interacts with one from a sub-cultural group, the two often experience the frustration of blocked communication and conflicts of values and interests, all of which create misunderstanding, tension, and uneasiness on both sides (Samora, 1965). The communication barrier makes it extremely difficult for the counselor, psychologist, or psychometrist to make an accurate diagnosis of the Appalachian. This helps to account for the extremely low IQ and achievement scores the outside therapeutic professional comes up with when he attempts to assess mountain folk and their children.

Spanish Heritage Groups

Spanish heritage designates most accurately the second largest minority in the United States. "Spanish surname" is a misnomer, since not all members of the group have names that sound Spanish. "Spanish speaking" is also inappropriate, for many Hispanic people cannot speak Spanish. So Spanish heritage is used here to refer to more than a million Puerto Ricans, most of whom live in New York City; the 100,000 plus Cuban refugees, the majority of whom live in Florida; to the nearly six million persons of Mexican ancestry; and to countless other individuals of Hispanic origin. Although these groups differ, some commonalities of which the counselor ought to be aware merit discussion.

Language barrier. For most Hispanic-Americans language is a source of some difficulty. This is especially true of Mexican-Americans in the Southwest, where they are so great in number. For example, in Albuquerque, the Chicano population is 25 percent; in San Antonio and El Paso, 40 to 50 percent; and in Laredo, 85 percent of the total population (Steiner, 1969, p. 142). Thus, it is easy to understand that the Spanish speaker can be so isolated in his language community that it is possible for him to go through life without ever learning English, or at least, learning it poorly.

Even the Spanish-speaking Anglo counselor has difficulty communicating with many immigrants who are not only illiterate in English but in Spanish as well (Moore, 1970, p. 122). Although the Spanish heritage counselee may know some English, he often claims to speak only Spanish, for it is less embarrassing to speak broken Spanish or "Tex-Mex" than it is to attempt English. This is particularly the case in the initial phase of counseling. Once a trusting relationship has been established, the counselor may be surprised to know that his counselee knows pretty good English. One should also recognize that some clients utilize their alleged inability to speak English as a passive-aggressive technique in dealing with the establishment (MacKinnon, 1971, p. 394).

Demand for respect. Respect is a significant aspect of the Spanish heritage culture. This is especially true of the Puerto Rican. A man in need of a job may

refuse to go to the U.S. Employment Service, simply because the clerks and counselors there do not accord him the proper amount of respeto (Anthony, 1964). That Puerto Ricans of all classes easily take offense at anything perceived as personal criticism is undoubtedly related to their demand for respect (Brameld, 1959, p. 200). This fact suggests, among other things, that the counselor who interprets test results to Puerto Ricans ought to be extremely respectful and courteous in doing so.

Machismo. When counseling the Hispanic male, it is very important to understand the meaning of machismo, which refers to one's manhood, the manly traits of honor and dignity, to the courage to fight, and to keep one's word and protect one's name. It also refers to a man's running his home, controlling his woman, and directing his children (Steiner, 1969, p. 386). Therefore, machismo, which provides respect from one's peers, is not to be taken for granted. Anglo female counselors in particular should not be too aggressive or forward in the way they conduct the counseling interview with Spanish heritage males. The right amount of deference must be shown the male at all times.

Suspicion. Counseling is a helping profession. This fact alone may constitute a barrier in counseling some Spanish heritage clients. There is a saying that "Whoever helps me is my enemy." It is for this reason that doing favors for others is rare and a cause for suspicion among some Mexican-Americans. Favors are generally associated with people de cultura who, it is said, do favcrs to get favors (Schoeck, 1969, p. 51). The counselor is advised to spend more than the usual amount of time structuring the counseling relationship, whenever he suspects that suspicion is an inhibitor to productive counseling.

American Jews

Writers, Jewish and gentile alike, have tried to answer the question, What is a Jew?, and they have come up with different answers. According to Stern (1969), a Jew is a person who has certain religious beliefs, belongs to a certain ethnic

group by birth, and has a sense of community. Van Den Haag (1969, p. 33) defines Jewishness as a feeling, a je ne sais quoi. Doroshkin (1969, p. 30) maintains that there is a Jewish community. The people in it, although not homogeneous, share a common history, tradition, cast of mind, Weltanschauung, and culture, which has arisen unconsciously out of four thousand years of similar experiences (Yaffe, 1968, p. 22). Since Jews constitute a cultural community, the counselor unfamiliar with the ethos of the group may be ineffectual helping them.

High motivation to achieve. Yaffe (1968, p. 29), Strodtbeck (1958), Blau (1969), and Glazer & Moynihan (1963, p. 155) are among the writers who have attested to the Jewish passion for educational achievement. The emphasis on intellect within the home, the family, and the community is transmitted to children at an early age and intensifies their need for achievement and the attainment of educational success (Van Den Haag (1969, p. 20). Long before the Jewish child is of school age, his parents hover over him waiting for the first sign of chochma, the Hebrew word for wisdom, or more colloquially, brightness (Blau, 1969).

The great emphasis placed on learning in Jewish families and communities probably explains why a disproportionate number of Jews is found at all levels of the educational system in this country. Nationally, about thirty percent of all high school students plan to go to college; but for Jewish youngsters, it is about 75 percent. Jews, as a proportion of the population, are overrepresented by about 260 percent in the college population and by 365 in élite institutions (Van Den Haag, 1969, p. 23).

Although an inordinate percentage of Jewish students qualify to enter the élite colleges and universities, many do not; and it is with this group that the high school college counselor must spend a great deal of time--helping the student and his parents wind down their sights. Often family pressure is so intense on the student to enter a given school or occupation that he develops a strong need for psychological counseling.

Jewish matriarchy. Although there has been much discussion of the black matriarch and her disastrous effects on her offspring, especially the male child, little has been said about the Yiddishe mameh. Between the mother and her child, there is a strong bond of love and mutual dependency (Blau, 1969). Caring for and stimulating the greatest intellectual growth possible in her child is the highest form of self-fulfillment and achievement for the mother. From the infant's earliest years, his ears are bombarded with his mother's constant chatter, usually endearing but often scolding. Some authorities attribute the child's intellectual achievement in great part to the verbal stimulation received not only from the mother but from the entire talkative family as well.

As the Jewish child matures, he finds that there is little abatement in his mother's talkativeness. Although most adolescents would "rather do it" themselves, whatever the It is, the Jewish youngster has less opportunity to do so without the constant verbal outpouring from Mother. The daughter from college reports that she has a new boyfriend. "Is he Jewish?" Mother wants to know. She also advises her son to get himself a "nice Jewish girl," very often one she has picked for him. The Jewish young man or woman's protest for independence from his or her mother lasts beyond that of gentile adolescents and young adults. An inordinate number of adolescent and post-adolescent inter- and intra-personal conflicts can be traced to the mother. Mother-offspring conflict seems to be especially intense for Jewish females approaching adulthood. Much of the source of the problem centers around the mother's great concern that her grandchildren may not be Jewish.

Jewish self-hatred? Allport (1954) indicates predictable reactions of oppressed minorities. Self-hatred is one consequence of being a minority in a social setting where that minority has any reason to feel that their members are being treated differently because of membership in an out-group. Although overt anti-semitism in this country has declined, today's heightened Jewish self-consciousness and publicity probably provoke a tacit counter-reaction from those who do not verbalize anti-Semitism. So long as Jews have to protest their

goodness for whatever reason, one may suspect that they are not comfortable with their Jewishness. Rosenthal (1960) indicates that Jews have become acculturated but not assimilated. Yaffe (1968, pp. 71-72) explains that often the Jew privately evaluates himself in the same way the anti-Semite does. If this be so, then counselors in secondary and collegiate settings should help Jewish students accept themselves as Americans and Jews simultaneously.

Japanese Americans

The Oriental population in this country is about 1.5 million in a national total of 204 million (Fersh, 1972). The Japanese, numbering approximately 600,000, constitute the largest group. They, like other Orientals, are 80 percent urban and live predominantly in Hawaii and California.

Envy and shame. To be effective, the non-Japanese counselor needs to understand several aspects of the Japanese personality. That it is an enigma has been attested to by a Jodo Shinshu sect priest who confides that it takes twenty generations to mold a Japanese; i.e., to inculcate the essence of order, obedience, and conformity (Meredith, 1966). These constitute the core of the Japanese personality, at the center of which is amae, or a basic dependency need. In Western thought, this phenomenon may be thought of as a basic need to be cherished and loved.

It may be viewed also as a fear of being envied (Schoeck, 1969, p. 55). This helps to understand why the Japanese tends to disparage his achievement or position. Failure to do so is to incur the envy of one's fellows. For example, if one praises the Japanese wife, the husband may respond with, "Oh no, it is not true." Or the Japanese husband may introduce his spouse as "Here is my stupid wife." Or he may denigrate himself or his children (Kitano, 1969, pp. 104-105). Thus, this phenomenon may interfere with assessing the potential of the Japanese. Taking his word for an understanding of his abilities is apt to be of doubtful value.

Shame is an important aspect of the Japanese personality. Characteristically, the individual is afraid of being shamed in front of others (Kitano, 1969, p. 104). As a child, his discipline emphasizes ha zu ka shi (others will laugh at you). It is especially important not to bring shame upon the family (Kimmich, 1960). Thus, one is to guard against such a possibility. One way to prevent it is to conform socially. That is, do and say the right thing, even though you don't feel or believe it. In the counseling interview, the individual's verbal expressions should not be taken as strictly representative of his true feelings.

Modesty and reserve. Closely related to shame is the norm of enryo, or modesty in the presence of one's superior (Kitano, 1969, p. 103). The phenomenon may be attributed to the overpowering respect paid the father, whose authority in the home is beyond question, and toward whom one is not supposed to express hostile feelings (Kimmich, 1960). Many Japanese are so imbued with the awe of authority that they are hesitant to express their views on any subject, when they are in the presence of higher status individuals, or when they are expected to articulate their views in groups. It is easy to see how this phenomenon may intrude in the counseling relationship, whether it be dyadic or group.

Characteristic reserve in the Japanese personality makes it difficult for the counselor to determine where the cultural patterns end and psychologically debilitating symptomatology begins (Kitano, 1970). The counselor needs to know whether the manifested behavior is a danger signal in the Japanese-American group or just something that dominant group members would consider unusual.

Generational differences. Although Japanese-Americans have been discussed here as if they were all alike, the counselor must be on guard against such a generalization. According to Kitano (1969, pp. 4-5), the basic framework for analyzing Japanese-Americans is eth-gen-class. There are the Issei (first generation); the Nisei (the American born offspring of the original immigrants); and the Sansei (the third generation) (Masuda, Matsumoto, & Meredity, 1970).

Albeit these terms are used, it is generally recognizedthat there is considerable overlap between the groups in their degree of commitment to shared problems and values, as Meredith (1966) points out.

Conclusions

Counseling racial and ethnic minorities presents problems which the counselor ordinarily does not encounter when counseling dominant group members. I have isolated some of them: language, taciturnity, suspiciousness, attending behavior, personalism, demand for respect, machismo syndrome, self-hatred, and modesty and shame, among others.

I have often defined counseling as a purposeful psychological interaction which usually takes place between two or more individuals, as opposed to a human being and a thing. One or more of the interactants is considered able to help the other person or persons to live and function more effectively at the time of the interaction or in the future. Specifically, the goal of counseling is to assist the recipient in adjusting to the various environments which influence his psychological well-being. This definition of counseling means that the counselor's role is twofold: he must relate to his client, and he must help him in some way. With minorities, the counselor, especially the dominant group member, may fall short on both counts.

Two things must be done immediately. First, we must recognize that a problem exists; and when I say we, I am referring to counselors, many of whom don't seem to realize when they are being tuned out by minorities. They proceed with their work as if everybody in this country were alike. Counselor educators also need to recognize that a problem exists.

Once having acknowledged the problem, we must then set about to alleviate it. That means that a massive in-service training program must be introduced throughout the country for all counselors working with minorities. Pre-service counselor education programs need complete revamping not only to provide better training for

counselors working with minorities, but for all counselors. The first order of business ought to be the establishment of an undergraduate degree program in counseling, so that young people can learn early the history, sociology, and psychology of minorities as well as the theories and practices of the counseling profession. A major part of their training should take place in the setting where they are apt to work; that is, in the barrios, the ghettoes, and other places where minorities live.

Unless we do something immediately about providing productive counseling for minorities, the whole profession is apt to be declared ineffectual and irrelevant, because we will have failed the segment of our population which needs us most.

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